

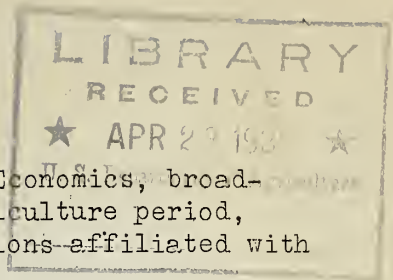
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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR



A radio talk by Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, broadcast Thursday, April 9, 1936, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by WMAL and 49 other stations-affiliated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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MR. GAPEN: Now, here's Ruth Van Deman, ready for another of her talks especially for the women of this audience. Miss Van Deman tells me that she's going to talk about women's dresses today, so I'm going to turn the microphone right over to her and bow myself out of the picture. Miss Van Deman and ladies, the next five minutes are yours exclusively - to talk about Easter dresses, or Easter bonnets, or what you will.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Gapen. But don't try to make us believe you are entirely above all interest in women's clothes. I think I've noticed now and then that a woman's dress is a family matter. I think I've heard men express their opinions about quality in women's clothes, especially if they thought somebody wasn't getting her money's worth in the store.

I had an experience the other day that brought home to me how difficult it is to tell what you are buying. I was hunting for a new dress. I saw a very pretty powder blue one in the window. So I went in and looked it over and tried it on. Of course I asked about the material. Was it silk? Or was it a synthetic? And was it pure dye or weighted?

The saleswoman was just as straightforward and helpful as she could be. But she was frankly puzzled. She said she thought it was silk, but she couldn't be sure. There are so many synthetics now that look like silks and feel like silks that it's hard to tell one from the other. She said she did wish the manufacturers would put labels on their garments. She didn't want to deceive anybody, she wanted to sell things for exactly what they are.

Well, I certainly said amen about the labels. But when we got to talking about what was on the labels on silk, for instance, I found that we had very different ideas about what certain terms meant. Take the words "Pure-dye silk." Somebody had led her astray by telling her that pure-dye silk referred to the purity of the dye, not to whether the fibers in the fabric were all silk. She could hardly believe it when I told her that the term "Pure-dye silk" as agreed on by the trade means that the fabric is for all practical purposes pure silk. It has nothing whatever to do with the quality of the dye.

Then this saleswoman, well informed though she was on many points, hadn't the faintest idea what I meant when I talked about weighted silk. She didn't know that some clever chemist had thought up the idea of impregnating silk with tin and other metallic salts to make the fabric seem richer and more luxurious than it really was. She didn't know that this weighting is really a form of adulterating textiles, and that though it gives them a fine effect when they are new, it weakens the fibers so that they break and the fabric is soon full of holes. She didn't know either about the burning test for silks - that if you touched a match to a piece of pure-dye silk that it would burn up

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almost completely and leave a little round ball of ash and give off an odor like burning feathers. And she'd never seen anybody try to burn a sample of heavily weighted silk. She didn't know that the little bit of silk in a fabric like that would burn away and leave the sample practically the same shape and size it was. In other words, that the metallic salts would be left, just like the steel framework of a wooden building after fire sweeps through it.

As it happened, there were no other customers in the store to be bothered by all our talk about pure-dye and weighted silks. We got so interested that we went from dress to dress feeling it and trying to tell what the fabric was. We even snipped tiny pieces off of the seams and burned them. Some fabrics proved to be pure-dye. Some plainly showed they were heavily weighted. We also compared the prices of the dresses, and found that price was no index of the quality of the material. Some of the weighted silks were priced higher than the pure-dyes. And we didn't find a single label on a single dress telling whether the material was silk or a synthetic.

Personally it makes no difference to me whether the fabric of my dress comes from the animal or the vegetable kingdom. I don't care whether a silk worm spins the fibers, or whether some magic of chemistry and machines makes them from cotton linters or wood pulp. Silk or synthetic, either may be good and beautiful. But I do want to know which I am buying so that I may expect reasonable service.

A printed tag on every dress would remove all doubt in my mind and save the stores a lot of bother. Maybe I'm over-optimistic, but I think the time will come when every good quality ready-made dress carries a tag telling exactly what kind of material it is made of. That will make Easter shopping and all our shopping much easier.

There have been some very interesting developments in the design of American dress fabrics recently. Maybe you noticed in the paper the story about Mrs. Roosevelt's new dresses made of fabrics of prize-winning designs. She wore one of them at her press conference at the White House one day so we could all see the lovely flowery pattern in various shades of blue and green. That design brought first prize to a girl in the Textile High School in New York in a competition sponsored by the International Silk Guild and the American Federation of Arts held an exhibition of all the designs in the contest. I believe that if we women show manufacturers that we appreciate their efforts to raise the artistic standard of their fabrics, and also that we want more definite information about the quality of the goods, we'll be doing them as well as ourselves a service.

MR. GAPEN: Miss Van Deman, did you send that saleswoman a copy of Miss Scott's leaflet on Quality Guides in Buying Ready-made Dresses?

MISS VAN DEMAN: I certainly did and marked the page on pure-dye silks. And the next day she called me up to thank me.

MR. GAPEN: Well, thank you, Miss Van Deman, for this very interesting talk. And I'm sure that any woman who is buying or selling dresses may have a copy of this leaflet - "Quality guides in buying ready-made dresses", by writing to Miss Van Deman at the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, in Washington.